

Steele Creek (1209K) Recreational Use Attainability Analysis Summary and Recommendation

A recreational use attainability analysis (RUAA) was conducted on Steele Creek (1209K) in the summer of 2010 to determine the appropriate recreational use and numeric criteria. Steele Creek is an unclassified intermittent water body that is approximately 46 miles in length. The creek is located in Limestone and Robertson counties. It was identified in the 2014 Texas Clean Water Act Section 303(d) List of Impaired Water Bodies due to elevated bacteria levels. It was initially listed in 2002.

The RUAA identified that the presumed use of primary contact recreation (PCR) for Steele Creek should be revised to secondary contact recreation 1 (SCR 1). SCR applies to water bodies where water recreation can occur, but the nature of the recreation does not involve a significant risk of ingestion. SCR 1 applies to intermittent and perennial freshwaters where site-specific information demonstrates that primary contact recreation has little to no likelihood of occurring due to physical characteristics of the water body such as shallow depths or lack of pools.

During the field surveys, field staff did not observe recreation. Four interviews were conducted with landowners who had property along or near the creek. RTV'ing was reported as a personal and witnessed use by one landowner. Horseback riding and hunting were the only heard of recreational uses on Steele Creek. Evidence of recreation included footpaths and ATV tracks. Steele Creek had an average thalweg of 0.56 meters (22.04 in) and had pools deeper than 1 meter. The thalweg depth was calculated from data from supplemental site visits. Flow was measured at two sites and the flow was 5.4 cubic feet per second. The Palmer Drought Severity Index (PDSI) indicated normal conditions during both field surveys. There are no public parks on Steele Creek. The creek flows through rural areas and most of the land is privately owned. Public access was very limited overall. Fences, gates, and private property signs are common public access limitations. All of the sites were at road crossings, and three had fences upstream and/or downstream of the access point. Other recreation impediments include steep slopes, logjams, trash piles, and debris in the water.

Limited access, steep banks, and instream debris decrease the likelihood of PCR use. Steele Creek has a shallow average depth and no accounts of PCR, supporting reclassification to SCR1. In accordance with §307.4 (j)(3)(C) of the Texas Surface Water Quality Standards, the TCEQ recommends a reclassification from PCR to SCR1 with the corresponding geometric mean of 630 colonies *E. coli*/100mL for all of Steele Creek, from the confluence with the Navasota River in Robertson County to a point 2.4 miles upstream of FM 147 in Limestone County. This reclassification is appropriate due to “physical conditions related to the natural features of the water body” in accordance with reasons specified in 40 CFR §131.10(g)(5).

Prior to changing the currently assigned recreational use of Steele Creek in the Texas Surface Water Quality Standards, the TCEQ would provide additional public notice and opportunity for public comment. In addition, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency would review this proposed change under the provisions of the federal Clean Water Act.